



Central Peninsula Church

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2 Timothy 4:1-5
Mark Mitchell
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Preach the Word

SERIES: *A Life That Counts: Studies in 2 Timothy*

There are times in our lives when what we really need is not a feeble pat on the back but a passionate kick in the pants. The history of nations and individuals would be different if it weren't for people who were willing to step up and deliver a great charge in just the right way and just the right time.

I think of Mordecai addressing his cousin Queen Esther at her moment of decision. The future of the nation Israel hung in the balance as an edict of death had been sent out against them. Mordecai issues the charge to Esther: "Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?"

I think of Winston Churchill speaking to a discouraged nation in the House of Commons, June 18, 1940. He said, "Let us brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will say, 'This was their finest hour.'"

On a lighter note I think of Knute Rockne addressing his Notre Dame team at half-time of the 1928 game against Army. It was his worst season as coach at Notre Dame and they were losing again. To inspire the players he told them the story of the death of the greatest player ever at Notre Dame, George Gipp: "Well, boys ... I haven't a thing to say. Played a great game...all of you. Great game. I guess we just can't expect to win 'em all. I'm going to tell you something I've kept to myself for years. None of you ever knew George Gipp. It was long before your time. But you know what a tradition he is at Notre Dame... And the last thing he said to me -- 'Rock,' he said - 'sometime, when the team is up against it, and the breaks are beating the boys, tell them to go out there with all they got and win just one for the Gipper... I don't know where I'll be then, Rock.' he said, 'but I'll know about it - and I'll be happy.'"

It's not surprising that Notre Dame went on to win the game against Army, and Esther went on to intercede on behalf of her people, and Great Britain went on to join the allied forces in winning the war. There is

something about a great word of challenge; a great charge where the call is made crystal clear and needed courage is summoned with passion.

That's what Timothy needed. Here he is a young man up against it. He's placed in a divisive church that must have felt to him like a den of wolves. Besides being inexperienced, he's timid by nature and prone to frequent ailments. His mentor, the man he's leaned on for guidance and strength, sits in a Roman prison waiting for Nero's order of execution. If ever Timothy needed a charge, it was now. Paul writes him this last letter as a kind of last will and testament. It's not surprising that it's a letter loaded with commands. We've already examined the first three chapters, but this morning we come to the central charge of the letter, where Paul crystalizes the call for young Timothy.

"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths."

I. The seriousness of the charge (v. 1)

Before we look at the content of the charge we should notice the seriousness and solemnity with which it's given. We live in a day and age where people are chided for being too serious or too heavy. Of course a sense of humor is a great gift. But there are times to stop kidding around. You don't yuk it up at half-time of a close contest, or at the critical juncture of a battle. This was one of those times for Timothy. Paul says, "I'm charging you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus. In other words, they're my witness. They're watching when I write this to you; you're accountable to them, not to me."

And then he offers three solemn realities about the future work of Christ which electrify this charge. First, he talks about his judgment. He'll judge the "living and

the dead.” The old KJV says “the quick and the dead.” Jesus himself told us, “**The Father judges no one, but he has entrusted all judgment to the Son**” (Jn. 5:22). Next Paul mentions the appearance of Christ; not his first appearing but his second appearing. Did you know Jesus is going to make another appearance? My oldest daughter got a chance to see a premier showing of Mel Gibson’s new movie, *The Passion*. It was stunning. After the movie, the actor who played Christ, James Caviezel, made a surprise appearance. Everybody there was blown away. Think of what it’s going to be like when the real Jesus makes his appearance! Scripture calls this our “blessed hope.” Like little kids waiting for dad to come home we eagerly wait for his arrival. Finally, Paul speaks of his kingdom. When he comes, King Jesus will establish his kingdom and we’ll reign with him.

Obviously, Paul wants Timothy to think about these things because they would provide for him the great motivation for his ministry. He needed to know that there were eternal realities at stake. Later in the chapter Paul talks about how he himself had internalized this. In v. 8 he says “**in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing.**” It’s not so much about fear; it’s about the excitement and anticipation of seeing the one we love and serve. Paul looked forward to these things. He wanted Timothy to look forward to these things and motivate him to faithfulness. And he wants all of us to look forward to them as well. But you have to be prepared. You have to be ready.

II. The content of the charge (v. 2)

For Timothy to be ready, he would have to pay heed to Paul’s charge. The content of the charge is found in the first three words of v. 2, “**Preach the word.**” Remember Paul just finished talking about the “sacred writings” or “the Scripture” at the end of chapter 3. The Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, are the word of God. It’s what Paul also calls down in v. 3 “**sound doctrine,**” in v. 4 “**the truth**” and in v. 7 “**the faith.**” That’s what he means by “the word?”

Timothy is not to preach his own word, but God’s word. The issue is not what HE wants to say, but what God has already said. He’s not to be the inventor of anything, but to communicate what has already been spoken. Furthermore, the focus is the word, not himself. It’s not about his own self

expression or personal experience. It’s not about the disclosure of his feelings or the telling of his own story. Those things might shed light upon the word, but the focus is the word.

We’ve seen already in this letter that Timothy is to believe the word, and he’s to study the word, and he’s to live the word, but here we see that’s not enough. He’s also to preach the word. I think Timothy was one of those guys who would have been very content to just stay in his study and forget about the preaching part. I’ll be honest - there have been many times in my life when I wished I could just stay in my study and read and think and write, maybe meet with a few people over coffee and chat about it. But it’s the preaching part, week after week, that gives me headaches and heartaches. Headaches because it’s just hard mental work. Heartaches because I know how seldom I live up to my own preaching. I think that was true for Timothy, and so Paul charges him, “Don’t just study the word; preach the word.”

What is preaching? Listen carefully to a definition from J.I. Packer: “Christian preaching is the event of God bringing to a congregation a bible based, Christ related, life impacting message of instruction and direction from (God) himself through the words of a spokesman.” Each part of that definition is worth thinking about. By the way, that’s not everybody’s job, but it was Timothy’s job and it’s the job of every pastor. And it’s through this preaching that the people of a congregation will grow up in their faith, and be equipped to use their God-given spiritual gifts, allowing the church as a whole to function as a healthy body with every part making a significant contribution.

I don’t think I have to tell you that there is a dearth of biblical preaching in America today. The very validity of preaching is being attacked today. The idea is to have lots of singing, a testimony, a bit of drama, a slide show, and maybe a 15 minute sermon to top it off. The idea is that preaching should take a secondary role because people today are so media saturated that they need more than just the spoken word.

Several years ago, *The British Weekly* published this letter:

Dear Sir:

It seems ministers feel their sermons are very important and spend a great deal of time preparing them. I have been attending church quite regularly for 30 years, and I have probably heard 3,000 of them. To my consternation, I discovered I cannot remember a single sermon. I wonder if a minister’s time might be more profitably spent on something else?

For weeks a storm of editorial responses ensued, finally ended by this letter:

Dear Sir:

I have been married for 30 years. During that time I have eaten 32,850 meals - mostly my wife's cooking. Suddenly I have discovered I cannot remember the menu of a single meal. And yet, I have the distinct impression that without them, I would have starved to death long ago.

Maybe that's why Peter said, "**Like newborn babes long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation**" (1 Peter 2:2). That's a verse not so much for the one who preaches, but for the one's who listen. So that when you come to church, you come expecting a well-prepared, balanced meal from the word of God that spiritually sustains you. Is that what you expect when you come to church? Not some kind of watered down little chat with a verse at the end; not someone just "sharing" from his own life; and not a dull and boring speech that has all the conviction of man reading from the yellow pages. But the word of God proclaimed with care and relevance and convicting power. If you come to church for that, you'll come humbly, perhaps even trembling, expecting the Lord to speak.

Now for Timothy to do that well, he would have to keep a few things in mind. He would need to "be ready in season and out of season." That means to preach it when it's convenient and inconvenient, welcomed or unwelcome. Preach it when you feel like and preach it when you don't. My wife is a wise judge of this stuff for me, and she tells me that it's when I feel least like preaching or even feel the most disappointed by what I've preached, God uses me the most. On the other hand there have so many times when I thought I had a home run, and I didn't even get to first base. Like the preacher who finished what he thought was an outstanding message. As he and his wife walked out to the car after church he turned to her and asked, "Honey, how many truly great preachers do you think there are in the country?" She turned to him and said, "One less than you think."

Timothy would also have to keep in mind that his preaching should include reproof, rebuke and exhortation. In other words, be relevant. Speak directly to people and where they're at. Don't shy away from correcting them and encouraging them to do what's right. It's like soccer. What good would a ref be if all he did was run back and forth and watch the game. He has to make hard calls. And every once in a while he has to pull out the yellow card and warn someone. If it gets really bad they get a red card. That's what you should expect when you come to church. There may be a few hard calls. When you hear the word of God

you may get a yellow card; sometimes you even get a red card.

Unfortunately there are some preachers who pull out the yellow card too much. And so Paul reminds Timothy to do all this "with great patience and instruction." He's not to be too quick with the card. He's to be patient and encouraging, especially with slow learners. He's not just to rebuke them but to instruct them; to be patient enough and practical enough that they can work on getting it right.

Now the question arises, Why? Why is preaching the word the great need of the moment in Timothy's day, and why does it remain so in ours? The answer comes in vv. 3-4.

III. The urgency of the charge (vv. 3-4)

"For the time will come..." That's the reason. The time is coming when people won't want sound teaching; they'll literally turn aside from the truth. But that's not all. They'll actually gather around themselves teachers who will say what their itching ears want to hear, turning from the truth to myths.

Isn't that what we see today? I don't want to be an alarmist but this describes our culture. It even describes our churches. If you come to church and you're living with your boyfriend or girlfriend and you hear the preacher say something that might indicate that's not what God would want, you can go find a church which endorses it. Or if you hear him say something as radical as Christ is the one and only way to find true salvation and that seems a little narrow you can go find one where they embrace every belief system as one of the many paths that lead to the same God. By the way that's nothing new. Jeremiah lamented, "**The prophets prophesy lies...and my people love it this way**" (Jer. 5:31).

There are so many lies and myths being spread today. We've already talked of this baloney about the lost gospels propagated in *The DaVinci Code*. There is so much more that lies at the root. There is the lie of scientific rationalism which says that science can solve all of our problems. Yet if you look at the record of scientific achievement, all the technological advances of which we are so proud today have resulted instead in the dehumanization of people, the pollution of our atmosphere, the corruption of our ways of life and the increase in threat to the welfare of the world. There is the myth of postmodernism, which denounces rationalism altogether, saying that there is no such thing as absolute truth or a coherent belief system. That

leads to the myth of moral relativity which tells that there is no right and wrong except for what is right for you. One of the most alluring myths today is the myth of eastern mysticism, which tells us that God is not a personal being who seeks to be in relationship with us, but he is some kind of cosmic jello which we all just kind of swim around in. It's like "the force" in *Star Wars* - you don't have a relationship with the force, instead you just learn to tap into it. These are all myths, yet people flock to these because they excuse us from any moral accountability.

It's in light of this atmosphere that the charge is given to preach the word. Don't miss the logic of this, as many have today. Paul says, "Preach the word! Why? Because they're not going to want to hear it." Did you get that? But what do so many of our churches say today? "Since they don't want to hear it, let's give them something else. Let's give them some drama or some stories or some flashy powerpoint." But Paul says, "The reason why you need to preach the word is because they won't put up with it!" That doesn't sound like a real pragmatic approach to building a ministry! "Give them what they don't want." But let me ask you moms, what would happen if you gave your kids exactly what they wanted to eat at all times? They would be so unfit you would have to carry them around in a wheelbarrow. But you don't do that. You give them a balanced diet. Sure they get a little "treat" once in while, but they get their fruits and vegetables, their meats and dairy. You don't give them what they want; you give them what they need. And as they grow and mature they develop a taste for the right things. As we grow and mature in the faith we come to love and appreciate the truth of God's word. We know that even when it's hard to swallow it's exactly what we need. When people get a taste for quality food, they can never go back to junk.

V. The necessities of the charge (v. 5)

Now in order for Timothy to complete this charge in an atmosphere of opposition and apathy there were certain necessities he would have to keep in mind. These are given to him in v. 5. First, be sober in all things. Literally this means to keep your head. Don't panic, don't go scurrying about trying to find the latest gimmick. Paul says, "Keep your head!"

It reminds me of playing golf with Gary Parsons. If you've never played golf with Gary it's quite an experience. He was out early one foggy morning and decided to hire a caddy. He hired a Scottish guy to carry his clubs and off we went. These caddies always are trying to help you with your golf game. After Gary teed off the first hole he could see he had a huge task ahead of him. But he said, "Keep your heed down." Gary, being the quick study that he is, continued to top every ball that he hit. For 17 holes the Scotsman kept saying, "Keep your heed down." Finally, he got to the last hole. Gary teed off first and sliced it off to the right. No surprise there! But instead of waiting for the others to tee off he walked ahead right towards a pond on the left side of the fairway. The Scot yelled to him, "Mr. Parsons, where are you away to?" And Gary said, "I can't stand it any longer. I'm going to drown myself in that pond." To which the Scotsman replied, "You'll never do it. You can't keep your heed down long enough! (I trust you will forgive me that lie).

So Timothy is to keep his head, and with that he is also to "endure hardship." You're going to have some bumps in the road, some days when you will want to bail out. But you need to hang in there. Don't walk off the course. Next he says to "do the work of an evangelist." An evangelist is one who leads people into a saving relationship with Christ. Why would he have to tell him to do this? Perhaps it didn't come naturally to Timothy. Perhaps it wasn't his gift, but he needed to do it anyway. This isn't my gift either. I'm a pediatrician; not an obstetrician. But when a baby needs to get born, you don't tell it to wait, you deliver it. Finally, he says "Fulfill your ministry." Don't be sidetracked. Keep at it. Do all the things you need to do right to the end.

What great words these are for all of us. Whether your ministry is one of preaching or not, this is a great charge for us. You wake up tomorrow morning and you say, "What am I to be about today?" You say, "Well, I think I'll keep my head, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, and fulfill my ministry." Maybe you get a little encouragement and affirmation on Tuesday, and then what do you do? You say to yourself, "Well, I'll keep my head..." On Wednesday you're up against it and everything falls apart and you just feel like walking away, what do you do? You keep your head...

CONCLUSION

In John Pollock's biography of Billy Graham there is recorded an incident which occurred when Lyndon Johnson was elected President. The President asked Billy, with whom he had been friends for years, what particular position he would like to have in his administration. Without a moment's thought Billy said to him,

"Sir, I believe that Jesus Christ has called me to preach his gospel. To me that is the highest calling any man could have on earth."

That's what Timothy needed to remember and that's what we need to remember as well: When you're up against it, "Preach the word... keep your head, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

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